

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31874/2309-1606-2018-23-2-259-264>

УДК: 38.014.15

Anna MURAWSKA

University of Szczecin

**MULTIDIMENSIONALITY OF
AUTONOMY IN UNIVERSITIES
AND HIGHER EDUCATION****Annotation**

The article presents central issues discussed during international conference «Crises of autonomy in universities and higher education». The conference was carried out at University of Szczecin, Poland (14-15th September 2018), which has a 25 years long tradition in organizing conferences on higher education. Researchers from Poland, Italy, Lithuania, Ukraine and Great Britain participated in the debate what enabled to show the problems from global perspective. The author mainly refers to the essence of academic autonomy along with its specific features as they were formulated by conference participants. She pointed out dynamics and multidimensionality. Autonomy is not unequivocally positive phenomenon what was time and again underlined at the conference, therefore it release various challenges and threats. The author presents them together with prospects of overcoming them, among them reflexivity oriented education as well as studying and researching based on three pillars: care, curiosity and community.

Key words: *autonomy, university, higher education, debate*

Autonomy and its crises in universities and higher education were discussed during international conference (14-15.09.2018) organized in University of Szczecin by Faculty of Humanities and Editorial Board of the journal „Pedagogika Szkoły Wyższej” (“Pedagogy of Higher Education”). It was the 25th jubilee conference in Szczecin concentrated on issues of higher education. Autonomy as a constitutive value for the quality of the academic life and a globally experienced arouses an interest not only Polish researchers. There were also participants represented Great Britain, Lithuania and Italy. Thanks to that fact conference obtained wider perspective of both – global and local matters.

Universities and higher education institutions are rooted in their traditions and a network of values. Autonomy is one of the most crucial of these traditions and values, and is frequently considered as a necessary for higher education to fulfil its vocation. Academic autonomy has many different dimensions, including: doing scientific research, organisation and practice of teaching, or-

ganisational aspects of academy, financial management, employment policy and studying.

The question of autonomy has always been problematic for the academy, and has long been of interest. From a historical point of view, there are two opposite attitudes: unconditional commitment to autonomy on one side, and rejection of any autonomy on the other. To our anxiety, there are several processes that severely threaten the autonomy of the academy. Traditional values – the foundations of academic culture – have been colonised by administrative-bureaucratic, political, corporate or business cultures. The cultures are built on ideas of efficiency, competitiveness, liberalisation, measurability, employability, mobility, and globalisation. They form a network of values, underpinning debates about universities and higher education institutions, and thereby reshape the higher education system.

Despite what we know there is still a great need to reconsider some questions: What does autonomy mean, today, to higher education? What are its dimensions? How can autonomy be expressed? What is its importance? What are the chances for its maintenance and development? What is the appropriate range and limits of autonomy? What threatens autonomy? How can we reduce these threats?

Autonomy – the game of power and knowledge

On the 1st of October 2018 in Poland a new Law on Higher Education and Science ('2.0 Statute') and its introductory provisions enter into force. The reform is comprehensive and it will result in immense changes in the functioning of universities, their financing, and scientific careers. On that account Barbara Kromolicka (University of Szczecin) who actively took part in consultation on new law, presented its significances for academic autonomy (*Autonomy of universities in the context of '2.0 Statute'*). Her analyses led to the conclusion that autonomy which is mentioned in the preamble of the new law as a main attribute of academy is apparent. It is a result of predominance of the chancellor, limited role of collective bodies and rigorous consequences of scientific work evaluation (accountability).

The universities autonomy evaluation in European extent is one of the activities of European University Association (EUA) which is the representative organisation of universities and national rectors' conferences in 47 European countries. EUA proclaims itself the independent voice of European universities. Nevertheless the autonomy is located by EAU in stiff, institutional frame and evaluated according to detailed institutional measurable criteria. The problems of institutional, group and individual autonomy were risen by Anna Murawska (University of Szczecin). Many research show that the increase of institutional

and group autonomy results in increasing of personal autonomy. Anyway the relations are very complex, and even in autonomic institutions there are people whose autonomy level is very low (Wellins, Byham, Wilson, 1993). That is why the awareness of distinction between the autonomy of the individual universities and of their academic staff and students is important.

Taking this into consideration Murawska (*Autonomy in the university. Towards a hermeneutic rationality of education*) showed the significances of hermeneutical rationality based education with its existential and interpretative character and orientation towards understanding world and a man him/herself that seems to be vital for personal autonomy as well as for education which is not “partial” (Adorno, 1972, 93).

Another way of the development of personal autonomy, especially in the context of programmatic centralism and decreed effects of education is emancipation. Maria Czerepaniak-Walczak (University of Szczecin) presented it in research and studying as creating areas of freedom and responsible acting in these areas (*Autonomy of education in the conditions of programmatic centralism and decreed effects of education*).

Autonomy – a dangerous or a good friend

Autonomy is usually indisputable considered as a positive value which materially affects various aspects of academic life, among them student groups (Ewa Bochno, University of Zielona Góra, Poland) as well as adult teaching and learning processes (Vaiva Zuzevičiūtė, Gitana Naudužienė, Mykolas Romeris University, Vilnius). Julian Stern (York St. John University, Great Britain) presented it also as a dangerous phenomenon (*What does autonomy look like? Just learnin'*). He pointed out that we are never completely autonomous and free, so a principle of autonomy is at best aspirational, and at worst illusionary. It is not difficult to conceive what universities would look like if they were exonomous (exonomy is the word Professor Stern uses as the opposite of autonomy). However exonomy is not only harmful. It harm when it blocks mutuality, disables community, limits genuine dialogue or helpful technical dialogue, and/or restricts the flourishing of care and curiosity, as the form of autonomy in universities promoted by Julian Stern is informed by three concepts: care (related to justice between and beyond people), curiosity (which drives learning, even when the learning is inconvenient), and community (a group of persons in dialogue) (Stern, 2018).

Autonomy was definitely “a good friend” for Flavia Stara (University of Macerata, Italy). She considered it as a fundamental pre-requisite for universities. It has not only personal or institutional meaning but also very important societal duties, as it is assumed that studying is a way of developing a citizen?

awareness to defence her/his rights, exercise duties and contribute to produce the conditions that make civil society more livable and more self-governable. It starts with micro-societies which is the university itself. On the one hand it corresponds to the „genetic code” of the medieval university and on the second – it leads to the conclusion that the whole society benefits from autonomy of universities (*University autonomy as a social asset*).

Tensions and ambivalence

Participants of the debate indicated various autonomy attributes, as its complexity, multidimensionality and dynamics. These features allow us to call autonomy confusing notion. Thus some tensions and a kind of ambivalence as its traits emerged from the discussion. Some of the examples are: tensions between belonging and distance, independence and collaboration, activity and withdraw, the need of external acceptance and auto acceptance, security and taking risk, the need of bond and separation (Elżbieta Wołodźko, University of Warmia and Mazury, Olsztyn, Poland). They do not exhaust the list. The others tensions were disclosed among individuality, autonomy and self-dependence (Janina Świrko, University of Szczecin) as well as between idea and practice of autonomy. The last, practice, was situated amid wishful thinking and festive statements (Piotr Domeracki, Nicolai Copernicus University in Toruń, Poland). Finding harmony and/or inflexible attitude towards tensions and ambivalence seem to be impossible and even detrimental for autonomy. Therefore permanent quest for balance is demanded (Hmel, Pincus, 2002, s. 278) if autonomy should be saved and secured against different attempts of expropriating it.

Challenges, threats and hopes

According to Mieczysław Malewski (University of Lower Silesia, Wrocław, Poland) We owe the notion of autonomy to Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835), but to be precise, it comes from the middle Ages tradition and should be recognized as fundamental for the European universities (*On three traditions of studying*). Is that still the same? Currently we experience some processes and phenomenon which transform the way of academic work and the way of studying. Universities have to face administrative control of the way of using public money. Therefore we have new challenges and threads like production of knowledge, economization of thinking and accountability of academic work (Andrzej Olubiński, University of Warmia and Mazury, Olsztyn, Poland), politicization and corporisation of scientific and educational institutions. All these make autonomy and social science development illusory (*Parameterization system of scientific achievements as a barrier in social science and social*

development). Anyway we are still able to identify plenty sparks of hope for academic staff and mostly for students education. Some of them could be find in Martha Nussbaum thoughts focused on educating the capacities for critical thinking, logical analysis, and imagining (Katarzyna Ciarcińska, University of Szczecin). Especially humanities should be included into educational curriculum, because, when practiced at their best, other disciplines are infused by what we might call the spirit of the humanities: searching critical thought, exercising daring imagination, empathetic understanding of human experiences of many different kinds, and understanding of the complexity of the world we live in (Nussbaum, 1997). The essential source of hopes could also be reflexivity, that is considered as a necessary condition of autonomy. Therefore education concentrated on reflexivity seems to be crucial for higher education (Agnieszka Jankowska, The West Pomeranian Business School, Szczecin).

As far as students are concern it is important to underline at least two different attitudes towards university. Some of students – having limited trust to universities – are not deeply intellectually involved in studying (Mieczysław Malewski). (Un)fortunately, the others often realize their need of autonomy by being active outside the university and even out of the educational system, for example by involving themselves in voluntary work or by various activities in students science clubs (Elżbieta Wołodźko, Ilona Kość).

Issues and questions discussed during conference are very extensive, so that debate was wide and carried out from various viewpoints but it was inconclusive. Many problems are still waiting for deep and multi-faceted research taking into consideration local and global context. Only chosen problems and matters deliberated at the conference are indicated in this text. Those who are interested in details of the discussion would find them in “Pedagogy of Higher Education” since the articles will be published in the following issues of the journal, beginning from the issue 2 (2018; <https://wnus.edu.pl/psw/en/>).

References

- Adorno, T. (1972) *Gesammelte Schriften*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Hmel B.A., Pincus A. L. (2002) The Meaning of Autonomy: On and Beyond the Interpersonal Circumplex. *Journal of Personality*, 70 (3), 277-310.
- Nussbaum, M. (1997) *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press.
- Stern, L. J. (2018) *A Philosophy of Schooling: Care and Curiosity in Community*. London: Palgrave.
- Wellins R. S., Byham W. C., Wilson J. M. (1993) *Empowered Teams: Creating Self-Directed Work Groups That Improve Quality, Productivity, and Participation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Анна Муравська. Багатовимірність автономії в університетах і вищій освіті

У статті розглядаються основні питання, що обговорювалися під час міжнародної конференції «Кризи автономії в університетах та вищій освіті». Конференція була проведена в Університеті Щецина, Польща (14-15 вересня 2018 року), який має 25-річну традицію в організації конференцій з вищої освіти. Дослідники з Польщі, Італії, Литви, України та Великобританії взяли участь у дебатах, що дозволило показати проблеми з глобальної перспективи. В основному автор посилається на сутність академічної автономії та її специфічні особливості, сформульовані учасниками конференції. Вона вказує на динаміку і багатовимірність. Автономія не є однозначно позитивним явищем, що було знову і знову підкреслено на конференції, тому містить різні виклики і загрози. Автор викладає їх разом з перспективами їх подолання, серед них орієнтовану на рефлексивність освіту, а також на вивчення та дослідження, що базуються на трьох стовпах: турбота, цікавість і спільність.

Ключові слова: автономія, університет, вища освіта, дебати.

Anna Murawska, Doctor of pedagogy (hab.) – associate professor at University of Szczecin; deputy director of Institute of Pedagogy, the head of Department of Theory of Education; long-term member of Polish Educational Research Association; Editor-in-Chief of Journal “Pedagogika Szkoły Wyższej” (“Pedagogy of Higher Education”). ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0949-9541>

E-mail: anna.murawska@usz.edu.pl

Анна Муравська, доктор педагогічних наук (хаб.) – доцент Щецинського університету; заступник директора Інституту педагогіки, завідувач кафедри теорії освіти; довгостроковий член Польської асоціації освітніх досліджень; Головний редактор журналу “Pedagogika Szkoły Wyższej”. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0949-9541>

E-mail: anna.murawska@usz.edu.pl